

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PANAMA 06861 292309Z

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

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EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELTN, EAGR, PN

SUBJ: DARIEN GAP HIGHWAY

REF: STATE 261688

1. OUR ASSESSMENT IS PREDICATED ON (A) LONG-STANDING COMMITMENT BY PRESIDENTS JOHNSON AND NIXON TO LATIN AMERICA TO CLOSE DARIEN GAP HIGHWAY BY 1976, THE YEAR OF OUR BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION, AND (B) GENERAL TORRIJOS' PERSONAL INTEREST IN THE OPENING OF THE DARIEN GAP HIGHWAY AS A MEANS OF ACCELERATING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGION.
 2. GOP IS KEENLY INTERESTED IN ADVERTISING BIDS ASAP AND WOULD PREFER OPTION A.
 3. IF USG CHOSE OPTION B, THIS WOULD MEAN ANOTHER YEAR DELAY AND ANOTHER COSTLY CONTRACT BECAUSE OF PRESENT TREND OF RISING PRICES OF GOODS AND SERVICES. WE UNDERSTAND THIS YEAR FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION IS COMMITTED TO PAY TWO-THIRDS OF EXPENDITURE INVOLVING RECONSTRUCTION OF TOCUMEN-CANITAS SEGMENT. ANOTHER YEAR DELAY WOULD COMPEL GOP TO DEFRAID ENTIRE COST BECAUSE THE EXPANSION OF TOCUMEN AIRPORT NOW UNDERWAY AND WHICH IS SCHEDULED FOR COMPLETION IN 1975 WILL CUT PRESENT INTER-AMERICAN HIGHWAY. PANAMANIAN PLANNED AIRPORT EXPANSION WITH UNDERSTANDING THAT TOCUMEN-CANITAS SEGMENT OF
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PAGE 02 PANAMA 06861 292309Z

HIGHWAY WOULD BE CONSTRUCTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH OUR STANDING

AGREEMENTS. OPTION B, THEREFORE, WOULD CAUSE BOTH ECONOMIC AND FOREIGN POLICY PROBLEMS FOR U.S.AND PANAMA. PANAMANIAN WOULD FEEL WE HAD RENEGED ON AGREEMENT. CURRENT DOWNTURN IN PANAMANIAN ECONOMY WOULD INTENSIFY ADVERSE PANAMANIAN REACTION.

4. CHOICE OF OPTION C WOULD AMPLIFY PROBLEMS CITED IN PARAGRAPH 3 ABOVE.

5. SHOULD THE U.S. DECIDE NOT TO COMPLETE ON SCHEDULE THE YAVIZA-COLOMBIA BORDER SECTION OF HIGHWAY, WE DOUBT THAT THE PANAMANIAN WOULD OBJECT STRENUOUSLY, IF AT ALL, BECAUSE THEY TOO ARE CONCERNED OVER THE AFTOSA THREAT EMANATING FROM COLOMBIA.
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